

## 7/02/2007 This Week in Congress

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July 2, 2007

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." This week, the House passed funding bills for our national parks and other environmental programs, as well as for our nation's treasury operations and executive branch. Included in that bill was a 2.7 percent cost of living increase for Members of Congress, which I oppose and voted against. I believe Congress needs to follow the lead of American families and be disciplined in its spending. The House also overwhelmingly approved an amendment to block the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) from imposing a "fairness doctrine" on radio and television broadcasters, which would require that political discussions on public airwaves be balanced with opposing viewpoints. I supported this amendment to prevent the FCC from interfering with free speech.

"This Week in Congress" is also available on my Web site each week. If you have trouble viewing it in your email or would like to view it online, you may access it [here](#).

Working to Increase Agricultural Trade with Cuba

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This week, I successfully offered an amendment to a Department of Treasury funding bill to increase the ability of U.S.

agriculture producers to market their products to Cuba. The U.S. needs to have a presence in Cuba and our agricultural products are a way to accomplish that goal.

An amendment I offered in 2001 allowed for the export of agriculture products to Cuba for the first time in 38 years. Agriculture exports were on the rise from 2001 to March of 2005 and during that time we sold nearly \$1.5 billion of agriculture commodities, food and medicine to Cuba. But a change by the Department of Treasury resulted in decreases in agricultural trade between our two countries. The Treasury Department changed its interpretation of how payments are made by Cuban importers of U.S. agriculture commodities, which caused payments to be made for agricultural commodities before ships leave U.S. ports rather than making payment upon delivery. This change is contrary to our normal trading practices and has only slowed and frustrated trade.

My amendment prohibits funding for the Treasury Department's decision and makes it easier for U.S. producers to sell their commodities to Cuba. Unilateral sanctions do not work. This rule only hurts our American farmers and there is no reason for our own government to make these sales more difficult. [Click here](#) for more information on this legislation and to view my speech to the House advocating for passage of the amendment.

#### Transportation Committee Passes Bill for Federal Aviation Administration

The House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee this week passed legislation for the Federal Aviation Administration to authorize funds for the equipment and personnel that keep our nation's airways safe. The committee rejected the controversial user fee proposal that would have been harmful to the general aviation community. Many of the general aviation aircrafts and parts are made in Wichita and this user fee proposal would have greatly harmed the economy there, as well as individual pilots across the state. This legislation will now be considered by the full House.

#### House Agriculture Committee to Begin Drafting Farm Bill in Two Weeks

This week, the House Agriculture Committee Chairman, Congressman Colin Peterson of Minnesota, announced the full committee will begin drafting the 2007 Farm Bill on July 17. The full committee drafting follows work by the six subcommittees on ten individual farm bill titles. Chairman Peterson expects to complete the Agriculture Committee's work by July 19 with a vote by the full House later in July. I will continue to be engaged in this process and defend Kansas agriculture.

### Senate Defeats Immigration Bill

The Senate voted this week to stop considering an immigration bill that would have offered citizenship to many illegal immigrants currently living in the United States. I have been opposed to the Senate's proposal since it was first drafted in May. This was bad public policy and I am pleased to see it was not agreed to.

### Meeting with Secretary of Education to Discuss No Child Left Behind

I met with Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings and other Members of Congress this week to discuss the reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind law. It was a good opportunity to hear from the Secretary about proposed changes and to ask questions and share concerns. I continue to place a high priority on this and have introduced legislation - the Practicality in Education Act - to see that we work to minimize the burdens it has placed on our Kansas school teachers. [Click here to read more about my legislation.](#)

## Attending Congressional Summit on Rural America

On Wednesday, I attended a congressional summit to discuss the needs and future of rural America. The forum featured government, academic and non-profit leaders, including remarks from Kansas Governor Kathleen Sebelius. I spend much of my time in Congress working to bring awareness of the unique needs and challenges of rural life to lawmakers representing more urban areas. The summit called attention to many of these issues and the importance of putting in place federal policy that ensures the future of rural America.

## Visiting with Wichita State Students from Washington, D.C.

While in Washington, D.C., on Wednesday, I visited with Professor Ken Ciboski's political science class via teleconference. I talked with the students about my role in Congress and answered questions. It is important that students have an understanding of how our government works, but it is also always a good opportunity for me to learn from the students. I would like to thank Professor Ciboski for the time visiting with his class.

## Visiting Republic and Washington Counties on Sunday

I stopped in Republic County on Sunday to see how the wheat harvest is going. I joined my agriculture legislative assistant, Aaron Popelka, on his family's farm near Munden. Like many farmers in this part of the state, Aaron's parents, Charlie and Jean, are facing low yields and low test weight on this year's crop following the Easter weekend freeze.

After stopping in Republic County, I joined area residents in Mahaska for the community's annual Fourth of July Celebration and enjoyed the ice cream social. Thank you to Barb Livingston and City Council Members James Hunt, Marvin Parrack and Cal Livingston for organizing the event and for the invitation to attend. I also visited with Mike Koss and his family. Mike served as an intern in my Washington, D.C., office this spring.

#### In the Office

Dr. Richard Gomez of Topeka was in with the College of American Pathologists to advocate for allowing certain independent laboratories to directly bill Medicare. Bill Wilson of Tribune, Sue Boldra of Hays, John Ross of Easton and Ken Thomas of Overland Park were in with the Center for Civic Education to share their experiences with the "We the People" program that teaches citizenship and encourages student engagement in government.

Natalie Bright and Carolyn Smith of Wichita and Chad Austin of Topeka were in representing the Kansas Hospital Association to talk about rural health care legislation and the need for rehabilitation facilities in rural areas. Mary Ann Thompson and Gary and Patty Rohr of Hays were in representing the Hays Public Library to tell me about recent happenings and events at the library.

George and Kim Unruh, Amy Jo Marshall and Amy Dudrey of St. John were in with the National Alopecia Areata Foundation to promote the need for increased awareness and funding for research. Hannah Beattie of Little River was in Washington, D.C., this week to attend the Congressional Arts Reception on Capitol Hill. Hannah is the winner from the First District in this year's Congressional Arts Competition and stopped by Tuesday to visit.

Several Kansans stopped by my office this week for a tour of the United States Capitol. Sue Havlik of Hutchinson, Nicole Ferguson of McPherson and Andrea Workman of Wichita came by, as did Joanne Proctor and Laura Autrey of Topeka. In from Salina were Janice Ostrom and Michael, Polly, Erin and Amy Hoppock. Amanda Raef of Caney, Lois Roebuck of Howard, and the Beattie family of McPherson - David, Rhonda, Hannah and Eli - also stopped by for a tour.

Very truly yours,

Jerry